

## Opening remarks at the first meeting of the National Climate Assessment Federal Advisory Committee

As prepared for delivery

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Good morning and thank you for joining us as we launch the next National Climate Assessment. I have two main topics to discuss today: (1) the importance of the National Climate Assessment process, and (2) the principles and expectations for the committee.

Very few environmental conditions affect our economy, natural resources, or citizens' lives more than climate. Up to one-third of the U.S. gross domestic product is directly influenced by weather and climate. In the U.S., climate-related changes are being documented: more frequent extreme weather events, longer growing seasons, shifting ranges of plant and animal species, and record low Arctic sea ice coverage in the summer. Future changes are projected to be larger and more rapid than those experienced over the past century and the impacts will extend across all economic sectors, including water resources, energy, transportation, agriculture, forestry, coasts, fisheries, and human health.

Climate variability and climate change are profoundly affecting our society and way of life. Some impacts of climate change may benefit sectors in certain areas of the country, and others will pose major challenges to our economy, our health, and our planet's resources.

The National Climate Assessment should strive to help the nation prepare for both the opportunities and challenges of climate change. Any change can be better managed with proper preparation. This is especially true for changes in climate. While there will be challenges, we can better prepare if we are informed of what to expect in a changing climate.

The U.S. Climate and Global Change Research Act of 1990 calls for the National Climate Assessment (NCA) to be the most authoritative scientific assessment of climate change and its impacts on the United States to date – impacts already being felt, and impacts yet to come. The NCA must be accessible to decision makers at all levels – national to local, and should contain new and updated information on climate science, including research findings more recent than the last IPCC report.

Today's decisions will determine whether climate change will present insurmountable or manageable challenges in the future. Therefore, we need effective methods to provide policy makers with relevant and credible science to inform their decisions—as we prepare for and reduce the severity of change in our planet's climate.

While it is important to understand the physical, chemical and biological science of climate, we must also incorporate social science disciplines in order for this information to be relevant, salient and useful to our communities and the nation.

This assessment follows on the heels of the 2009 Assessment report entitled "Global Climate Change Impacts in the United States." The 2009 Assessment was influential because it succinctly summarized

the impacts of climate change on different regions and economic sectors of the country, and it was written in plain language, with easy-to-understand graphics.

Each of you has been selected to serve on this Federal Advisory Committee for a reason. You were chosen for your expertise and the extensive knowledge that you bring to this endeavor.

I want to thank Commerce Secretary Gary Locke for appointing such an outstanding group.

Among you are representatives of the relevant disciplines, diverse viewpoints and every region of the country. Of the 46 seated committee members, there are 23 states represented. Among you are academics, and representatives of the private sector, local and state government, and the non-profit sector.

Every effort was made to ensure that we have the broadest diversity possible and a high caliber of expertise and experience so that we emerge from this assessment process with a robust report of findings that best characterizes the current state of climate impacts in the United States.

As an ecologist, I look at the Earth system holistically. I appreciate the importance of connecting the physical, biological, ecological and human parts of the Earth system. And I know that the scientific understanding of these interconnections must underpin the development and implementation of solutions.

The National Climate Assessment aims to incorporate advances in our understanding of climate science into larger social, ecological, and policy systems, and provide integrated analyses of impacts and vulnerability. It will help evaluate the effectiveness of our mitigation and adaptation activities and identify economic opportunities that arise as the climate changes. The Assessment will also serve to integrate scientific information from multiple sources and highlight key findings and significant gaps in our knowledge.

One of the overarching objectives is to help the federal government prioritize climate science investments. In doing so, you will help provide an assessment that can be used by communities around the nation to create more sustainable and environmentally sound plans for our future.

In every aspect of this assessment, we will commit to transparency. Every transaction will be open to the scrutiny of the public, who deserve to know how our findings were derived, and who deserve to have a voice in shaping the final report.

And of course, we will conduct all activities upholding the highest ethical standards, and within legal bounds.

The assessment is an opportunity to capture the latest information and the most current state of the science regarding climate impacts in the U.S. Therefore, we must also commit to adhering to the highest scientific standards, so that the findings and recommendations will be robust and withstand scrutiny. The assessment will be not only comprehensive and relevant, but also reliable and trustworthy.

Now that you are seated on this advisory committee, your first task will be to develop a clear strategic framing of the assessment process, including realistic goals, and a detailed implementation plan. Over the next few days, you will be presented draft materials for your consideration, and I anticipate

that you will engage in a lively discussion. It will be your responsibility to guide the development of the assessment report and chart your direction.

In addition to the planning challenges ahead, we must be mindful of the funding challenges. Anyone who has followed the news knows how difficult the federal budgeting process has been for FY11. Although the President identified specific resources in the FY11 and FY12 budgets to support the work of this committee, we currently continue to operate under continuing resolutions. This is the budgetary reality. We need to adapt to it and work within it to produce a strong product.

With full recognition of how important your work is, I want you to know that we expect each of you to roll up your sleeves and give your full effort to this assessment. Through your extensive experience, hard work, and commitment to providing our nation with solid science, you can provide an invaluable service. If well executed, you will lay the groundwork for years to come that will facilitate a continuous assessment process, and build an enduring system of linkages between a disparate group of stakeholders, who are providers or users of climate information.

I know all of you are fully committed to this enterprise. I look forward to following your progress and receiving your final report.

Thank you again for your time and your hard work. I hope that your participation will be personally rewarding as well.

And now I would like to introduce Dr. Rebecca Blank, Under Secretary of Commerce for Economic Affairs, who will speak on behalf of Secretary Locke. Dr. Blank is a seasoned economist, and has a strong interest in the activities of the assessment as well as this committee.

Dr. Blank, we look forward to your comments.